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## A STUDY IN WIVES.

BY MAX O'RELL, GRANT ALLEN, KARL BLIND, AND H. H.  
BOYSEN.

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### THE FRENCH WIFE.

THE politics of matrimony is a science inborn in French women. Let a French woman be the mistress of a superb mansion in the Champs-Élysées or of a poor little fifth-floor flat, she always has the charm of feminality. However poor she may be, she is always tidy, smart, alert, *bien coiffée*, *bien gantée* and *bien chaussée*. She has a little bustling, fluttering way about her that will always keep your interest in her alive. Every one of her movements is supple and artistic. To lift her dress modestly and gracefully as she crosses a muddy street, she has not her equal in the world. She may be sometimes, I confess, a little affected, but she is never vulgar, and when she speaks to you you cannot guess from her speech whether she is the wife of what society calls a gentleman or not. Put a little French seamstress or milliner in the most aristocratic drawing-room for an hour, thanks to her keen power of observation and her native adaptability, she will, at the end of that hour, talk, cross the room, sit down, rise, leave the room as simply, as naturally, as the most high-born lady in it.

Her constant aim is to be interesting to her husband. She multiplies herself. In turn she is his friend, his confidante, his partner in business, his chum, and, if I may use the word in its best and most refined sense, his mistress. She is forever changing her appearance. For instance, you will seldom see a French married woman wear her hair in the same way longer than three or four weeks. She knows that love feeds on trifles, on illusion, on suggestion. She knows that, when a man loves his wife, a

rose in her hair, a new frock, a bonnet differently trimmed, will revive in him the very emotion that he felt when he held in her his arms for the first time. She also knows that the very best dishes may sometimes become insipid if always served with the same sauce.

She understands to a supreme degree the poetry of matrimony. I have heard men say that matrimony kills poetry. The fools! There is no poetry outside of it. And the poetry has all the more chance to live long in French matrimonial life because our wedding ceremony is not, as in England, the end of courtship, but only the beginning of it. In France, when you have married your wife, you have to win her, and the process is very pleasant. I have often told my English friends that if in their country there were not so many kisses indulged in before the wedding ceremony, there would be a great many more administered after it. Why is the French woman of forty so attractive? Because every feature of her face shows that she has been petted and loved.

But, some Englishmen have said to me, in France couples marry without knowing anything of each other. That is true.

In England I have known couples who had been engaged ten years and who were still hoping to know something of each other. Poor couples! They might be engaged fifty years without attaining that end! Life, during an engagement, consists of sentimental walks, the repetition of the same story. The sky is serene, the sea is smooth. How do they know they are good sailors until they have been in the same boat in a good big storm?

Ah, let misfortunes come, to say nothing of the price of butter and the length of the butcher's bill! When they are engaged and they leave their respective homes to meet, they look at themselves in the glass to see there is nothing amiss about their toilet. They are on their best behavior; they put a bridle on their tongues. But, put them married, of an evening, one each side of the fireplace, he sulking over a book with his slippers on (his slippers on, what an utter want of respect to a woman!) and she with her curl papers. True love may get over the curl papers, but it must be very, very true. And why curl papers? Let us talk about it. Why, you will say, to be beautiful, to be sure! Oh, but when? *Only to-morrow*. That is too late. A French

woman is never visible before noon, not even to her husband, because all the morning she has her curl papers on, so as to be beautiful the same evening. Do you see the difference? Do you understand how practical this is?

Through French life, the married woman goes on the principle laid down by Balzac, that a man who penetrates into his wife's dressing-room is either a fool or a philosopher. She does want him to be a philosopher, and she takes great care that he does not make a fool of himself.

MAX O'RELL.

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### THE ENGLISH WIFE.

THERE is no one ideal of the English wife—because there is no one ideal of anything in England. The English nation, as Matthew Arnold long ago pointed out, consists of three distinct and mutually antagonistic elements,—the aristocracy, the middle class, and the artisans and laborers. Each of these has its own ideas, if any; each of these goes its own way in utter isolation, unaffected by the ideas that obtain above or below it. I shall, therefore, treat of the three elements separately, beginning, as is natural, at the lowest rung of the ladder.

The ideal wife of the laboring classes is a housewife and mother of the antique Teutonic pattern. She rules the kitchen. Before she married, she went out to service for some years in a gentleman's house, where she acquired those habits of neatness and tidiness which stand her in good stead in her husband's cottage. She was cook or housemaid or "general"—a "general" is best for the working man; and she knows how to make ten shillings a week go as far as the condition of the market can carry it. After "keeping company" with her young man from sixteen to twenty-four, she succeeds in marrying him. She is a mother of ten children living, "and five in the churchyard," which last episode she regards as a natural incident of maternity. She brings them all up to be neat and tidy like herself, sends them to board-school betimes, with shoes and stockings on their feet, and puts them out in the world to the best advantage as soon as they have passed the sixth standard. The boys go to trades, for she means them to rise; for the girls, she gets places in a gentleman's family—for choice the rector's—where they are well taken

care of. She sends the little ones to church neatly dressed on Sunday, and sometimes goes herself, but not too often, for she must stop at home to cook the one hot weekly dinner. When she shows up at church or chapel at all, it is chiefly in the evening; after which she may go for a walk with "her man" and gossip with her neighbors. She has the profoundest faith in her well-meaning husband, and often remarks that "no woman hadn't never a better man than our Joe;" he seldom strikes her, except when he's been drinking; and even then, he's always sorry for it afterwards. She manages to extract from him by dexterous coaxing every Saturday night the greater part of his wages, save only so much as the common feeling of virile dignity compels him to retain for expenditure at the public house. She never grumbles about his pipe and his tobacco. She sends him his "vittles," hot in a can, to the place where he works, by one of the children. She spends her life in hard toil, endless household drudgery; she washes and cooks and sews and makes beds for her husband, herself, and her ten clean little ones, their faces are almost as white as their pinafores; yet she believes in God in a blind sort of way, and attaches great importance to religious ceremonies. But she has no soul; how could she find time to attend to one? She is the material ideal of a materialized, brutalized, soulless peasantry; she does her duty in that state of life to which it has pleased God to call her with a heroism that moves one's respectful pity.

The ideal wife of the middle classes touches far higher planes. She can play the piano! As a girl, she was brought up at a good average school, where she learnt to be a lady, and not much else save to write an invitation. She is usually good looking, buxom and bright as a girl, rather than refined or spiritual. Her cheeks are rosy. He meets her, falls in love with her (if the phrase may stretch so far), and straightway gets engaged to her. She is faithful to him with a fidelity that knows no faltering. She does not idealize him, but she loves him dearly, and believes with touching faith in his solid goodness. She thinks John perfect. After some years of waiting they are rich enough to marry, and she settles down at once into the purely domestic wife and mother. Her function is not to live her own life or expand her own soul, but to play the part of his social representative. She is an appanage of his respectability. She presides with solemn

and silent dignity at the head of his table. She drives out with portly pride in his carriage, when he gets one. She calls on his friends' wives, and asks their daughters in due rotation to tea and tennis. She produces six wholesome-looking children herself at measured intervals, and spends most of her time thenceforth in frittering uselessly over their nursery arrangements. She takes no part whatsoever in her husband's business, and asks no questions about it; she contents herself with spending her house-keeping money wisely, to the best advantage, and dressing herself and her pretty children as creditably as possible on their respective allowances. She keeps the home beautiful, with antimaccassars and white muslin curtains. She continues to play the piano in a progressively feeble way till the girls succeed her, but she makes no other sacrifices to the strange gods of culture. She is not much of a novel reader; into poetry or general literature, still less into science or thought or politics, she makes no wild excursions. Her domain is the drawing-room; in her husband's mind she represents the social and gracefully artistic, or emotional, side of his serious existence. For him, the counting-house; for her, the parlor! As she grows old she develops laterally into the British matron—an awesome person of a certain size, a certain age, and great social distinction. She then devotes herself wholly to her girls and boys, trying to make the first into replicas of herself, and to prevent the last from doing in early life exactly as their dear father did. She carries the whole family triumphantly to church, and marries her daughters well to men of excellent principles. She is the simple and unattractively virtuous ideal of a solid, stolid, unimaginative *bourgeoisie*.

The ideal wife of the aristocracy—does not exist. The British aristocrat has no ideals. He was born cynical, with a good-humored, matter-of-fact, man-of-the-world sort of cynicism; and he carries his congenital creed unabashed through the world with him. He sows his wild oats in many fields; then he marries, for the settlements. His wife is rich, or beautiful, or both; she lives in society. He and she go their own ways forthwith; and those ways usually land one or other in the divorce court. Occasionally both of them reach that goal together. They smile and part, after rearranging the settlements which form the practical basis; thence they drift into the world once more, and begin

again *da capo*. Their ideal is to enjoy themselves; in their own reckless way they usually attain it.

GRANT ALLEN.

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### THE GERMAN WIFE.

WHEN a German is asked about the best qualities of the women of his fatherland, he is, first of all, apt to think of those who have written and sung in their praise since olden times. Our cultured classes are very much historically inclined. Their thoughts, therefore, easily go back to Tacitus, who says that, in the opinion of our forefathers, "something sacred and prophetic attached to women; that their councils did not remain disregarded, their utterances not undervalued."

The Roman author speaks of the famed prophetess, Veleda, of Aurinia, and other women held in high veneration. Not servile flattery, he adds, was conferred upon the female sex, as if it were composed of goddesses. But so fondly were husbands devoted to their wives, so great was the respect paid to womankind in general, that the idea of any of them falling into the enemy's hands was more unbearable to a German than the prospect of his own captivity. In battle mothers and wives tended the wounded, and their applause of bravery was looked upon as the highest reward. Their prayers and laments as to the fate which would await womenfolk in case of defeat often produced a fresh, courageous rally among the shaken ranks of a sorely-pressed warrior host. In several chapters Tacitus draws a remarkable picture of the ideal state of things as regards marriage among that primitive Teuton nation, conveying thereby a manifest, though veiled, satire upon the manners and morals prevailing in his home at Rome. "A German wife," he also says, "was not to look upon herself as being outside the world of thought of struggling men. The very ceremonies of her union to a husband were to remind her that she was to be his associate in trials and dangers."

But enough of classic testimony, of which there is plenty. When we come to the Middle Ages, there is a wealth of poetical effusions among our Minnesingers in honor of German women and wives. Foremost among them stands Walther von der Vogelweide, the greatest lyrical bard of his time in Germany, whose renown shone through many following centuries. He "had seen

many lands, and with the best people he had become well acquainted ; but evil, he thought, should befall him if foreign manners were to please him more. Between the Elbe and the Rhine, and up to the frontiers of the Hungarian land, he had found the best women of the world ; they were like unto angels." "Virtue and pure love—he who seeks them (says Walther) should come to our country, where there is a fullness of bliss. Oh, may I long live there !"

There is occasionally a different strain between those rapturous pæans even in Walther. Ulrich von Lichtenstein, who wrote a book called "*Frauendienst*" (Worship of Women), is also responsible for a later one, in which, in the form of a dialogue, the decay of chivalrous love is deplored, and the fault mutually thrown by a knight and a noble lady upon each other's sex. But it must not be forgotten that these amatory productions of our mediæval singers, especially of those of aristocratic descent, had always a tinge of the artificial in them. They rather point to the special customs of a class whose poetical spokesmen were in the habit of celebrating love adventures of a sometimes risky kind under the garb of an almost eccentric use of purity talk.

Famous in mediæval German tradition is the history or tale of the *Weibertreu* ("Wives' Fidelity"), which has been sung by Bürger. It refers to the siege of the town of Weinsberg, in Suabia, by the Emperor Konrad III., in the twelfth century, when, after the capitulation, the men who had offered a long and stiffnecked resistance were sentenced *en masse* to death, whilst their wives were to be allowed to leave without hindrance, taking with them, "what was most precious to them." Instead of clothes and jewelry, as was expected, they came out of the stronghold with their husbands on their backs. It is, at any rate, a pretty tale, typifying the ideal German wife of the burgher class.

It need not be said that in the many centuries which followed upon the literary epochs of the Minnesingers and of the Mastersingers, or civic bards, the praise of women is occasionally varied by pungent squibs. That is an inevitable result of the march of civilization which produces many and different types. Yet even so great and merciless a satirist as Fischart, the German Rabelais of the sixteenth century, has wonderfully sweet descriptions of the happiness of domestic life, of the soothing ways and manners



of the true *Hausfrau* and of the tender love between parents and children. However, it would lead too far, considering the restricted space allotted to the contributions to this symposium to say more of Fischart's or of the many modern poets' and writers' references to the ideal German woman. Goethe, in his *Torquato Tasso*, makes the Princess say:

*“Willst du genau erfahren, was sich ziemt,  
So frage nur bei edlen Frauen an.”*

This has become a standard quotation in German literature. Again, who does not know Schiller's poem:

*“Würde der Frauen”—  
Ehret die Frauen! sie flechten und weben  
Himmlische Rosen in's irdische Leben—*

or his “Song of the Bell,” in which the true wife and mother is depicted at the side of the hard-striving husband, in noblest terms which have become household words in the Fatherland?

Did Schiller mean by these pictures of domestic bliss to shut out women from the larger concerns of patriotic aspirations and from care for the cause of freedom as against tyranny? Let anyone who has a doubt on the point read Schiller's grand drama, *Wilhelm Tell*. There, Gertrude, the wife of Stauffacher, is most prominent as urging on the men to rise against oppression. She, before all, gives counsel, both wise and courageous, to her own husband, quite in the style of German women of Tacitus' time. In the same powerful drama, the peasant women are drawn in similar traits of love for popular freedom; refusing, as they do, to bow before the hat which Gessler has had planted on a pole as the sign of his autocratic rule.

Whilst I am writing this, there comes news of a speech of Prince Bismarck, in which he alleges that fifty years ago no German woman busied herself with national affairs, but that now the times are changed for the better! The ex-Chancellor has for years made many speeches in the most contradictory sense. On this occasion he simply forgot the enthusiastic conduct of a mass of German women in the War of Deliverance against Napoleon I., and the sacrifices made by them for patriotic objects. He forgot, or he purposely ignored, the fact of the hearts of vast numbers of German women having been in the cause of national freedom and union during the forties, and the ardent sympathy

they showed with the champions of liberty in 1848-49, as well as the risks and sufferings, in the way of persecution and imprisonment, which some of them underwent in those years of storm and stress.

To be, not "platform mothers," but good housewives, and at the same time to take a deep interest in all that is good and noble in literature and art ; to make a happy home, to bring up children with fond care, and also to think of, and so far as the difference of sex allows, to act for the public weal of their country and for the intellectual, moral, and social progress of humanity at large ; such in the opinion of the best among us, be they men or women, is the ideal German wife.

KARL BLIND.

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### THE SCANDINAVIAN WIFE.

AT a time when all ideals are rapidly changing it is difficult to furnish even an approximate description which will not be challenged. The kind of ideal wife of whom Norse youths dreamed twenty years ago, whom the poets sang and the painters painted, is now reported to be in the process of extinction ; and the new species of femininity which is said to be taking her place would feel insulted by being associated with the term ideal. A Norwegian young lady of good family, who some years ago was a guest in my house, could see nothing improper in exploring the Bowery and Hester Street by night in the company of a male and a female friend, and when I meekly objected to her striking up an acquaintance with gentlemen in Central Park of a Sunday she laughed in my face and told me *sans cérémonie* that I was an old foggy. My ideas of propriety she intimated were moss-grown, antedeluvian, and smacked of the ancient period of bondage which, happily, was now at an end.

During a recent visit to Norway I discovered that this type of woman, so far from being exceptional, is exceedingly common. She certainly occupies the front of the stage, is all-pervasive and ubiquitous. During the summer you meet her on the public highways, with her knapsack on her back, on foot or on a bicycle, attended or unattended, snapping her finger in the face of all old-fashioned notions of decorum. I cannot conceive what kind of wife she would make, because I cannot conceive of the kind of man who would have the audacity to marry her. And yet she

does not infrequently marry. I cannot help suspecting that she must, in such a case, have exercised the right, which she claims, of choosing, instead of waiting to be chosen; and the poor man, in his embarrassment, has evidently lacked the courage to exercise his right of refusing, instead of waiting to be refused.

Now, I do not claim, of course, that this "virago of the brain," this representative of "the third sex" (to quote Mr. Le Galienne), is the ideal woman of Scandinavia, still less that she would make an ideal wife. But she has, for all that, to be taken into account, because she is, by her presence and her noisy propaganda, visibly modifying the old ideal of Scandinavian wifehood and womanhood.

In my student days we used to sing with immense enthusiasm the song, "The Women of the North," which among other exploded commonplaces, declared that "the lily resembles the bride of thy heart, the fair, Northern maiden"; and that "she stands unaltered, exhaling her coy fragrance; she is the blossom of blossoms." Though this standard comparison with the lily has been repudiated as misleading and uncomplimentary, it has not yet lost and never can quite lose its application. For the qualities which the man demands the woman is bound to supply, or feign their possession, under penalty of celibacy. And Scandinavian man does not differ essentially from the male of other civilized races in demanding of his wife all the standard copybook virtues. He looks to her primarily to uphold the dignity of his house; to give, by her presence and manner, a certain *éclat* to his hospitality; to make his domestic machinery run as smoothly, noiselessly, and economically as circumstances will permit. He associates with his vision of her a certain sweet matronliness which grows more pronounced with the years, as the children gather about her knees. Though the girl be ever so coy and submissive to her lover's wishes, he knows that it is in the nature of things for the young wife to develop, through the experiences of wifehood and motherhood, a personality which must not only win love, but also command respect. As his true comrade and faithful friend she stands at his side, shares his burden, and bears with him the brunt of the hard battle of life.

When I look back through the long gallery of noble Scandinavian women whose portraits my memory retains, the embarrassment of riches makes me loath to choose. One, however, whose

beautiful personality spread a quiet radiance about her simple life, I may, without invidious comparisons, select as fairly representative, and the man of whose home she was the bright and shining focus would have been the first to claim for her every ideal perfection. It has always been a marvel to me how this mother of six children, every one of whom claimed her attention and care, could yet preside with a calm and gentle dignity at the great dinners which her husband's position compelled him to give, superintend a large household, over every minutest detail of which she kept supervision ; and yet preserve, amid innumerable harassments, which would have driven a man to distraction, a benign, unruffled amiability, and an unfailing helpfulness which ever gave and gave, without thought of demanding anything in return. From the early morn to the dewy eve she was in ceaseless activity ; never breathless and hurried, but always quietly ministering to the wants of the many whose welfare was in a hundred ways dependent upon her foresight, sagacity and tender solicitude. At seven o'clock in the morning she presided at the breakfast table pouring the hot tea for boys, while snowdrift and darkness lay thick upon the window-panes ; and I can yet see her benign, somewhat worn face in the lamplight over the large copper tea-kettle. Then she would remind them of their books so that nothing was forgotten, wrap them up warmly in their scarfs and overcoats, kiss each one good-bye with a dear little maternal admonition on the way ; then get papa's breakfast, which came later, and listen sympathetically to his grumbling about the ever increasing expenses, calm his occasional irritability, invent ingeniously maternal excuses for Finn's low averages, Bertha's hoydenish behavior, Olaf's habit of tearing his clothes, etc. There was balm in her words, healing in her touch, solace in the very cadence of her voice. Though she left no record behind her, except in the hearts of her sons and daughters, who mourned her early loss, I cannot conceive of a nobler life than hers, nor one dispensing a richer blessing.

HJALMAR HJORTH BOYESEN.